Hijacking of Italian merchant vessel

1048. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) whether an Italian merchant vessel was recently hijacked on its way to Kandla Port in Gujarat;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(c) what action has been taken by Government to rescue the vessel from the hijackers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The Coast Guard Regional Headquarters, Mumbai received information from Chairman, Kandla Port Trust on 9th June, 2000 that Merchant Vessel Medstar registered at Kings Town has reportedly been hijacked by 14 stowaways who had boarded the vessel at Port Bandar Abbas, Iran. The stowaways comprising 10 Iranians and 04 Iraqis claimed to have bomb with them and threatened to blow the ship if their instructions were not followed. The ship after loading 312 MT of granite at Bandar Abbas was scheduled to arrive at Kandla Port on 11th June 2000.

On 10th June, 2000 at about 2330 hrs the Master of the Ship reported that the vessel was 270 NM West of Okha and slowly heading towards East. The vessel was subsequently located by Coast Guard Ships at about 0230 hrs on 12th June approximately 70 NM due West of Okha well within the Indian EEZ. Thereafter, the vessel was kept under constant surveillance by the two CG Ships. The vessel remained adrift at the same position till about 1600 hrs on 12th June and escorted by CG Ships to Mumbai as per the request of the owners and the negotiators of the P&I Club in Germany. The vessel under CG escort arrived outer anchorage off Mumbai about 1930 hrs on 13th June, 2000 and remained under CG surveillance. The vessel was thereafter shifted to inner anchorage at about 1345 hrs on 14th June to facilitate boarding of the vessel by investigating agencies. At about 1620 hrs a bomb disposal squad of Mumbai Police and Joint Investigation Team (JIT) comprising representatives of Navy,

Customs, CBI and IB boarded the vessel and carried out the investigation onboard ship. The Commander, Coast Guard Region(West) provided assistance to the immigration authorities to carryout independent interrogation. Representative from P&I Club, Bremen, Germany who arrived at Mumbai alongwith an interpreter, also negotiated with the stowaways from 14—20 June, 2000. Consequently, the 10 Iranian stowaways were issued with travel documents by Iranian Embassy to travel by air and they left on 23rd June, 2000. The vessel sailed from Mumbai on 24th June with 04 Iraqi stowaways under escort of private security agencies hired by the owners of the vessel for Bandar Abbas via Kandla.

Financial performance of ports

1049. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that despite eight per cent average rise in traffic volume, profits in all major ports, barring one has declined sharply over the past years; if so, the details in this regard, port-wise;

(b) what corrective measures Government have taken in the matter; and

(c) whether Government propose to convert these ports into public undertakings; if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV): (a) No, Sir. As may be seen from the statement annexed, (*See* below) all major ports, except Calcutta Port Trust had operating surpluses during the years from 1996-97 to 1998-99.

(b) On the advice of the Government constant efforts are being made by the management of Calcutta Port Trust to attract more cargo to the Port and to reduce expenditure, wherever necessary.

(c) No such proposal is under consideration of the Government.